

Editorial

Book reviews – keeping up to date in the era of the information superhighway

The *Journal of Clinical Nursing* prides itself on its achievements; indeed one of those achievements has been bringing new and current information to the attention of the readers. In the era of the information superhighway, knowledge is power. My goal as the book review editor is simple: to continue the developments instigated by my predecessor Professor David Thompson. At last I have settled into a routine, books are coming through slowly and reviews are being printed.

I have taken a moment to reflect on the past 12 months and to think about the future. I want to increase the number of books reviewed; in addition, I want to include reviews of video and CDROM materials. The internet is here to stay: the journal must address the changes taking place in the way information is stored, shared and used. With a clear commitment by the government to improving information in the NHS and the focus on evidence-based practice, it is imperative for a journal like the *Journal of Clinical Nursing* to do all it can to help clinical nurses stay informed.

One of my major challenges is to find a network of people who are willing to review books and materials for me. I have taken the view that this network should be as representative as possible, including educators, researchers and, most importantly, nurses in clinical practice. Forgive me, but at this point I want to make a plea: please, please, anyone who is interested in writing book reviews contact me with an e-mail or postal address so that I can contact you.

Often when I approach people to undertake a book review they are unsure what is involved and how they should do it. Whilst I am wary of presenting a 'recipe' or 'formula' for writing a book review, the following are some guidelines.

A book review has been defined in Webster's New International Dictionary as: 'a descriptive and critical or evaluative account of a book'. Critical and evaluative are the key words in describing a book review. Book reviews generally tend to fall into one of three categories – favourable, unfavourable or mixed. For most reviewers writing a review presents an opportunity to share a balanced review of a book on which they themselves have formed an opinion.

The most difficult part of any writing venture is the 'How to'. How does one write a book review? First of all there is no correct answer to this question. Book reviews are brief, ranging from 500 to 750 words. The structure should be a series of paragraphs, each describing a single aspect of your critique. The first paragraph, especially the opening sentence, should attract the casual reader and make them want to read on. In this paragraph it is usual to outline the aims and scope of the book. The remaining paragraphs describe the central ideas of the book, and provide an exploration of the key ideas or arguments.

It is important that you say something about the ideas presented from your own perspective and that you summarize the major strengths or limitations you find in the text. In the final paragraph, aim to balance the book's achievements and weaknesses, ending with to whom you might direct the book – student, practitioner, etc.

Writing a book review carries with it a number of responsibilities that are shared by everyone who seeks to provide competent and informed clinical nursing practice. It is important that every one of us finds ways to keep up-to-date with new ideas and knowledge to underpin our professional nursing practice, and impartial and fairly judged book reviews help readers to choose appropriate educational material.

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